

# Current status of the E. coli Outbreak Linked to Romaine Lettuce out of Yuma

June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2018

On June 1, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) updated the public on the E.coli O157:H7 outbreak linked to Romaine lettuce from the Yuma, AZ, growing region. Which has now become the largest foodborne outbreak related to produce in the last 10 years. This included increasing the numbers affected to a total of five deaths. To date, 197 people have been reported sick in 35 states (an increase of 25 cases since May 16<sup>th</sup>). 89 people have been hospitalized. 26 of those have developed hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS), a type of kidney failure. At least six people in Canada are also confirmed with the outbreak strain of E. coli.

More cases are likely, as there can be a two-to four-week between an ill person being confirmed and the report reaching federal authorities. But, the numbers of new cases have declined in recent weeks and officials are hopeful that the outbreak is nearing an end.

The source of the contaminated lettuce is still being investigated. Whole heads from eight inmates sickened in Alaska have been traced to Harrison Farms of Yuma, but officials have not determined where in the supply chain the contamination occurred. Attorneys for those sickened in this outbreak have determined, and publicly disclosed, that clusters of illnesses are linked to Panera, Texas Roadhouse, Red Lobster and Papa Murphy's. Freshway Foods, a processor, has also been identified. Incomplete and incompatible shipping and receiving records continue to slow CDC trace back efforts on the chopped romaine, which restaurants and grocery stores sold to consumers. Officials are reviewing dozens of growers, processors and distributors, many of whom do not use labeling to provide complete supply chain traceability.

The CDC has reiterated that the romaine lettuce in question is no longer available for consumption. The last shipments from the Yuma region were harvested in mid-April, and the harvesting season has since ended. Because romaine lettuce has a 21-day shelf life, it is highly unlikely that consumers, restaurants or retailers would still have it in their possession.

For more information on this outbreak visit:

<https://www.fda.gov/Food/RecallsOutbreaksEmergencies/Outbreaks/ucm604254.htm>

In response to this latest outbreak, stakeholders from within the produce industry have formed the Leafy Greens Food Safety Task Force. The goal of this group is to “assess and address issues associated with recent foodborne illness outbreaks attributed to consumption of leafy greens and to prevent such a tragedy from occurring in the future.”

<https://www.foodsafetymagazine.com/news/leafy-greens-industry-forms-task-force-in-light-of-romaine-lettuce-outbreak/?emailaddress=jkeefe@urmstores.com>

